

“Like every American I’ll never forget where I was last Saturday. My wife and I were shocked and saddened when we learned of the attack on our colleague Gabby Giffords, her staff and her constituents.

“Gabby is a hard worker, a talented legislator and has been said poignantly on this floor so much better than I will ever be able to today, she’s a dear person. And a unique individual who is universally liked in the House of Representatives.

“We’re praying for her recovery, the recovery of all those injured and the comfort of the families of the fallen.

“I rise with gratitude to the leadership of both parties in this institution for moving this thoughtful resolution to the floor. Today the American people speak with one voice. We will condemn these unspeakable and evil acts. We will remember the injured and the lost.

“And we will gently reaffirm our ideals.

“This act was an unspeakable act of violence. And those responsible must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

“But as we mourn with those who mourn, two words of gentle admonition:

“First, we cannot fear free assembly because of the acts of a single assailant. We live in an open society and enjoy representative democracy under our Constitution. Our system depends on regular and informal contact with our elected representatives. Neither the public nor its servants should be dissuaded from participating in public assembly because of the despicable acts of a single deranged person.

“Lastly, I understand the pain that Saturday last has caused for so many in this body and around the country but we cannot fear free and open debate. Democracy depends on heavy doses of civility and as my colleagues know I have always sought to model that here on the floor and elsewhere.

“We should always refrain from engaging in personal verbal attacks against those with whom we differ on important questions of the day. But let me say, we must also resist in these moments of heartache the temptation to assign blame to those with whom we differ for the acts of others. No expressed opinion, on the left or the right, was to blame for Saturday's attack and we must resist efforts to suggest otherwise because to do so has the potential to inhibit and erode our freedom.

“So we rise to mourn with those who mourn and grieve with those who grieve.

“We cannot fail to be moved by the tragic events in Arizona. We must not fail to pray earnestly for all those affected. And we will not fail to defend our freedom lest it be one more victim of the horrific events in Tucson on Saturday last.”